client computer **10** and become a permanent feature of displays. A typical use of this feature would be to store the user's home location and display it on any map covering that location.

In a preferred embodiment, persistent locations are stored using the extensions to HTTP known as "magic cookies". The magic cookie parameters used are based upon the request parameters listed above, i.e.:

Set-Cookie: Home="lon=-0.1666&lat=51.545";

Software may be provided for the conversion of postal codes (zip codes) into longitude and latitude information. Software may be provided for the conversion of full or partial addresses into longitude and latitude information. This software is normally provided on the map server **11**; in this case, the user enters an address or postcode in a form and sends this to the map server. The map server responds with an HTML document containing longitude and latitude, and the user receives a map of the locality of the address or postcode. Alternatively, such software can be provided on the client computer **10**.

The system and method of the present invention avoids the classic problems of Geographic Information Systems (GISs) by imposing a single, standardised geographic reference model, and restricting data exchanges to those classes of geographic information which can conform to the reference model.

Because of this, servers providing information do not have to deal with maps, map ownership issues or mapping software, and information from several different sources can be integrated on a single screen.

It is of course envisaged that the invention may be implemented in ways which are different from the ways specifically exemplified above. For example, the coordinate data embodied in the map and facility information may be presented in ways other than in absolute latitude and longitude format.

Embodiments of the present invention have been described with particular reference to the examples illustrated. However, it will be appreciated that variations and modifications may be made to the examples described within the scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of operating a computer system, the method comprising:

storing on a map server computer map data representative of a map of a geographical area;

storing on the map server computer coordinate data indicative of spatial coordinates of at least one point associated with the geographical area represented by the map, so as to enable correlation of points on the map with their corresponding geographical location;

storing on an information server computer information data relating to at least one place of interest within the geographical area, said information data including data representative of the spatial coordinates of the place of interest within the area;

transmitting a map request to the map server computer from a client computer, and transmitting from the map server computer to the client computer in response to the map request the map data;

utilizing the map data to display an image of the map on a visual display unit associated with the client computer;

transmitting an information request to the information server computer from the client computer, and transmitting from the information server computer to the client computer in response to the information request the information data relating to at least one place of interest within the geographical area; and

displaying the information data relating to at least one place of interest on the visual display unit.

2. A method according to claim **1**, wherein the map request is transmitted before the information request, the information request being formulated by including coordinate data provided by the map server computer.

3. A method according to claim **1**, wherein the information request is transmitted before the map request, the map request being formulated by including coordinate data provided by the information server computer.

4. A method according to claim **1**, including superimposing information relating to the place of interest on the image on the visual display unit, at a position on the image corresponding to the location of the place of interest on the map.

5. A method according to claim **1**, wherein the client computer includes means for zooming the map image in or out to display an image of, respectively, a smaller or larger geographical area, and means for varying the displayed data relating to the at least one place of interest on the visual display unit so as to take account of the smaller or larger geographical area.

6. A method according to claim **5**, wherein the client computer includes means for formulating a further request to the information server computer, to identify places of interest lying within the smaller or larger geographical area.

7. A method according to claim **1**, including:

storing on the map server computer a list of categories of places of interest;

retrieving the list with the map data; and

displaying on the visual display unit a respective icon for each said category.

8. A method according to claim **1**, wherein the request is effected by activation of a respective icon on the visual display unit.

9. A method according to claim **1**, wherein the client computer includes locating means for establishing the current geographical location of the client computer, and the method includes passing the current geographical location of the client computer to at least one of the map server computer and the information server computer.

10. A method according to claim **9**, wherein the locating means uses the Global Positioning System.

11. A method according to claim **9**, wherein the locating means includes a cellular telephone.

12. A method according to claim **9**, wherein the client computer includes means for superimposing on the image an icon indicative of the current geographical location.

13. The method of claim **1**, wherein the client computer communicates with the map server computer and the information server computer via a World Wide Web.

14. The method of claim **13**, wherein the displaying of the information data on the video display unit is performed by using an internet browser.

15. The method of claim **1**, wherein the map data transmitted from the map server computer is an image file.

16. A method of operating a computer system, the method comprising:

storing on a map server computer map data representative of a map of a geographical area;

storing on the map server computer coordinate data indicative of the spatial coordinates of at least one point associated with the geographical area represented by